

What Is Claimed Is:

- 1 1. A method for upgrading a user environment, wherein the user
2 environment has a product with a component operable to run at a low operating
3 level and a high operating level, the component of the product being set to operate
4 at the low operating level, the method comprising:
5 associating an upgrade key with the product, the upgrade key having
6 permission instructions for the component of the product to operate at the high
7 operating level; and
8 enabling the component of the product to operate at the high
9 operating level in response to the upgrade key being associated with the product
10 in order to upgrade the user environment.
- 1 2. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
2 associating a security mechanism with the product, the security
3 mechanism containing permission instructions for the component of the product to
4 run at the low operating level, wherein the security mechanism updates the
5 permission instructions for the component to run at the high operating level upon
6 the upgrade key being associated with the product.
- 1 3. The method of claim 1 wherein:
2 the product is a computer.
- 1 4. The method of claim 3 wherein:
2 the component is a central processing unit of the computer.
- 1 5. The method of claim 3 wherein:

2 the component is a hard disk of the computer.

1 6. The method of claim 3 wherein:
2 the component is random access memory of the computer.

1 7. The method of claim 3 wherein:
2 the component is software of the computer.

1 8. The method of claim 1 wherein:
2 the upgrade key is a cryptographic update key.

1 9. The method of claim 1 wherein:
2 associating an upgrade key with the product includes associating a
3 smart card having the upgrade key with the product.

1 10. The method of claim 1 wherein:
2 associating an upgrade key with the product includes transferring
3 the update key from the Internet to the product.

1 11. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
2 disabling the component of the product from operating at the high
3 operating level in response to the upgrade key being associated with the product
4 after expiration of a lease period.

1 12. The method of claim 1 wherein:
2 enabling includes enabling the component of the product to operate
3 at the high operating level for a single use of the product.

1 13. The method of claim 1 wherein:
2 enabling includes enabling the component of the product to operate
3 at the high operating level for multiple uses of the product.

1 14. The method of claim 1 wherein:
2 enabling includes enabling the component of the product to operate
3 at the high operating level permanently.

1 15. The method of claim 1 wherein:
2 enabling includes enabling the component of the product to operate
3 at the high operating level temporarily.

1 16. A system for enhancing a user environment, wherein the user
2 environment has product with a component operable to run at a low operating level
3 and a high operating level, the component of the product being set to operate at the
4 low operating level, the system comprising:
5 an upgrade key having permission instructions for the component
6 of the product to operate at the high operating level; and
7 an enabling mechanism for enabling the component of the product
8 to operate at the high operating level in response to the upgrade key being
9 associated with the product in order to upgrade the user environment.

1 17. The system of claim 16 wherein:
2 the enabling mechanism includes a security mechanism containing
3 permission instructions for the component of the product to run at the low
4 operating level, wherein the security mechanism updates the permission
5 instructions for the component to run at the high operating level upon the upgrade
6 key being associated with the product.

1 18. The system of claim 16 wherein:
2 the product is a computer.

1 19. The system of claim 18 wherein:
2 the component is a central processing unit of the computer.

1 20. The system of claim 18 wherein:
2 the component is a hard disk of the computer.

1 21. The system of claim 18 wherein:
2 the component is random access memory of the computer.

1 22. The system of claim 18 wherein:
2 the component is software of the computer.

1 23. The system of claim 16 wherein:
2 the upgrade key is a cryptographic update key.

1 24. The system of claim 16 wherein:
2 the upgrade key is contained on a smart card.

1 25. The system of claim 16 wherein:
2 the upgrade key is contained in data of the Internet.

1 26. A method for upgrading a user environment, wherein the user
2 environment has a service operable to run at a low operating level and a high

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- 3 operating level, the service being set to operate at the low operating level, the
- 4 method comprising:
- 5 associating an upgrade key with the service, the upgrade key having
- 6 permission instructions for the service to operate at the high operating level; and
- 7 enabling the service to operate at the high operating level in
- 8 response to the upgrade key being associated with the service in order to upgrade
- 9 the service.